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From Heliogabalus to Hitler

Among the more popular of the books of nonfiction at the City Library are those works dealing with the rise and fall of Hitler's Third Reich. Many well-known writers are represented, including Allen Dulles, Liddell Hart, Trevor-Roper and Wheeler-Bennett, and various aspects of the drama are dealt with in publications dating from 1947 to the present time. Whereas the earlier arrivals commanded a sizable public, the accelerated stream of books on this period of German history appearing in the last two years have lost none of their charm for local readers, judging from the difficulty experienced in securing them. Even those people without special interest in the subject can be fascinated with it. The mushroom growth and collapse of a major country, complete with details, all within living memory, could hardly be more unusual.

Although a great many of the principal actors did not survive the events in which they took part, a surprising number of them did so and some of these seized the opportunity to contribute memoirs setting forth firsthand accounts of them from their own point of view. Thus we have the stories of Gen. Heinz Guderian, one of the world's leading tank experts, ex-chancellor von Papen, and Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, among others, although not all of these are possessed by the Library. In addition, the U. S. Army has salvaged many of the stenographic reports of the daily war conferences at Hitler's headquarters, which have been published under the title, "Hitler Directs His War." These have the obvious advantage of being no one's opinion, but verbatim accounts of what was discussed.

It is impossible to study the voluminous literature on the Nazi period without striking comparisons of the reign of Heliogabalus, Roman emperor in the Third Century, springing to mind. At the same time many remarkable accomplishments which have not yet been duplicated took place in that wild era when a world was born and died. The type of man necessary to exist in such a maelstrom is exemplified in the word-picture of old Gen. Erich Ludendorf, marching at the head of Hitler's column in his attempted Munich putsch, who when met head-on by regular troops sent to break it up by gunfire, kept right on marching forward through them alone while the rest of the column was scattered.

Movie-goers in search of thrills, if they have not forgotten how to read, could get more real excitement from the story of Germany from July 20, 1944 on, when the last attempt to assassinate Hitler took place, than from all the Hollywood plots they have ever seen. But the whole period is depressing to review, and leaves a bad taste in the mouth. This is an era which would have been more appropriate in the Third Century with Heliogabalus than in modern

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